

TUCKER CARLSON BURNS FBI OR NSA INTERCEPTS REGARDING HIS 30-MONTH PURSUIT OF FACE-TIME WITH VLADIMIR PUTIN

Last week, I suggested that one possible explanation for Tucker Carlson's claim to have been spied on by NSA is that he had a back channel with Russian operatives and was trying to get ahead of allegations that he was coordinating with Russian agents.

Particularly if the communications implicating Carlson were damning and potentially illegal, leaking them to *him* would be an easy way to flip the story, and accuse NSA of spying rather than Carlson of coordinating with Russian agents. Again, that's all just a hypothetical that might explain Carlson's claims.

Overnight, Jonathan Swan – who's a political reporter, not a surveillance reporter – described that sources claimed authorities had obtained communications from Tucker Carlson's efforts to get an interview with Vladimir Putin. Swan describes that Tucker had two intermediaries with Russia, but they live in the US. (I had hypothesized these might be Ukrainian sources, but Swan suggests they're Russians.)

Two sources familiar with Carlson's communications said his two Kremlin intermediaries live in the United States, but the sources could not confirm whether both are American citizens or whether both were on U.S. soil at the time they communicated with Carlson.

Swan doesn't note that if the surveillance happened in the US, it would have formally been an FBI intercept, not an NSA one (just as the intercepts showing Mike Flynn's secret back channel with Russia were collected by the FBI). But he does a good job of laying out the most likely ways this happened, which is that the NSA or FBI were surveilling the kind of people they're supposed to surveil: Russian agents, whether overt or covert.

- *The first – and least likely – scenario is that the U.S. government submitted a request to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to monitor Carlson to protect national security.*
- *A more plausible scenario is that one of the people Carlson was talking to as an intermediary to help him get the Putin interview was under surveillance as a foreign agent.*
- *In that scenario, Carlson's emails or text messages could have been incidentally collected as part of monitoring this person, but Carlson's identity would have been masked in any intelligence*

reports.

- *In order to know that the texts and emails were Carlson's, a U.S. government official would likely have to request his identity be unmasked, something that's only permitted if the unmasking is necessary to understand the intelligence.*

The import of the agency involved – FBI or NSA – is that “unmasking” works quite differently for the FBI, which has a duty to guard against spying in this country. FBI agents tracking a known Russian agent might review such communications to find out if a high profile US journalist was being recruited by a known Russia spy. And if this was the FBI, it might explain how it recently became known: because Merrick Garland’s DOJ is trying to disclose all the tracking of journalists that took place under the Trump Administration.

This entire faux scandal feels just like ones that Devin Nunes has twice sown, first when Republican members of Congress got picked up undermining US policy with Bibi Netanyahu, and then again when Trump’s Transition team set up a secret back channel meeting with UAE. Each time Nunes has done this, it was with the seeming intent of flipping the scandalous efforts of Republicans to undermine US policy.

That’s consistent with Tucker’s claim that his source is “in a position to know.”

The whistleblower, who’s in a position to know, repeated back to us information about a story we are working from that could have only come directly from my texts and emails. There’s no other

possible source for that information, period. The NSA captured that information without our knowledge and did it for political reasons.

But it also means that, if true, then Tucker and his source – whom Tucker himself suggests had a need to know – just burned intercepts on legitimate surveillance targets from a hostile country.

Plus, there's a far bigger problem with Tucker's currently operative story. Jason Leopold liberated Tucker's FOIA request to obtain what he claims would be proof of this spying. Whether intentionally or because of incompetence, the FOIA was written in such a way that it is guaranteed to fail to find anything, because it uses language that NSA would understand to mean communications targeting Tucker (and, specifically, communications obtained from physical possession of Tucker's phone).

More interesting than the failure by design is the scope. Tucker believes these sensitive communications – ostensibly a recent effort to set up an interview with Vladimir Putin – extend from January 1, 2019 until June 28, 2021, the date he first revealed this.

Describe the records you seek, and provide any additional pertinent information (up to 5000 characters):
Date Range of Requested Documents

I am requesting any call records, texts, or emails the NSA has obtained from journalist Tucker Carlson's cell phone or email. I am requesting any memos or documents related to surveilling journalist Tucker Carlson. I am requesting any communication between NSA officials regarding journalist Tucker Carlson.
01/01/2019 -- 06/28/2021

That's thirty months he has been working with Russian back channels, purportedly to set up a meeting with Putin.

That, by itself, may explain why the communications generated further attention (if indeed they did). Thirty months isn't the pursuit of an interview, it's a long term relationship. This would look like a recruitment effort, not journalism.

It also explains why, even though Tucker himself is the person who leaked these details (again,

burning what by all accounts are legitimate intercept targets), he claims it was an effort to take him off the air. If the FBI believes that Tucker really was pursuing a long-term relationship with Russian agents, then even Fox News might rethink giving him a platform. But that wouldn't be the content of the communications, per se, but the fact that they appear to have been going on for thirty months.